



君と 僕の 歌

world's end

story
橋本 紡

Tsunagu Hashimoto

illustration
高野 音彦

Otake Takano

すべてを失った世界で、
僕は君と出会った——。

電撃文庫ビジュアルノベル

「リバーズ・エンド」の橋本紡&高野音彦が贈る、はかなくせつないラブ・ストーリー

Novel Illustrations

Our Song: World's End

Our Song

world's end

And then, our paths crossed.

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Tsumugu Hashimoto

illustration
高野 音彦
Otohiko Takano

O u r Song

w o r l d ' s e n d

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And then, our paths crossed.



The supermarket was embraced with silence and dimness.

Alone, I walked around the shop like a migrating fish. Vacuum-packed rice, a sardine can, and a bottle of mineral water were things I placed into the basket.

I stopped in front of the magazine rack.

Even though winter had come, the magazines placed here showed only things related to summer. Idols wearing swimming suits smiled in the covers of these magazines. I also tried to smile like those idols, but my reflected face in the glass of the windows contained no intention of a smile. Even if this is an idol's smile, I would say, you won't feel happy if you see it every day.

With everything needed, I went out of the supermarket.

Of course, I didn't pay.

Humans who worked as cashiers didn't exist any longer.

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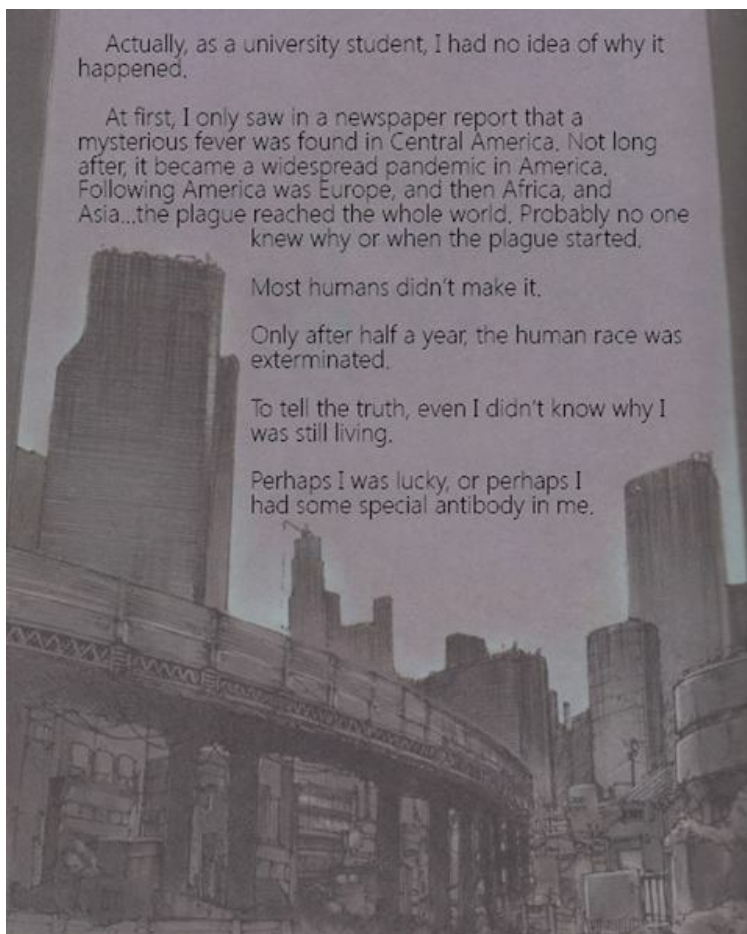
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Actually, as a university student, I had no idea of why it happened.

At first, I only saw in a newspaper report that a mysterious fever was found in Central America. Not long after, it became a widespread pandemic in America. Following America was Europe, and then Africa, and Asia...the plague reached the whole world. Probably no one knew why or when the plague started.

Most humans didn't make it.

Only after half a year, the human race was exterminated.

To tell the truth, even I didn't know why I was still living.

Perhaps I was lucky, or perhaps I had some special antibody in me.

I ate my dinner beside the buzzing, noisy electric generator.

I heated the vacuum-packed rice, opened the can of sardine, and drank the bottle of mineral water.

My room was on the peripherals of Nishi-shinjuku, a single room spanning only six tatamis. Through the small window, vaguely, I could see high-rise buildings as well as monochromatic and widely arranged streets, everything shrouded by the moonlight tonight. There were no families with their lights on: the tall residential buildings resembled black gravestones.

Perhaps they were really gravestones, for humans didn't exist any longer.



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Azure sky.

Chirping birds.

Fresh air.

Although humans were exterminated, the world hadn't changed a bit.

Some might think this unbelievable, but I thought this natural. Humans had always remained an insignificant existence.

Closing my eyes, I regulated my breathing patterns leisurely.

Not long after, suddenly, I heard meowing sounds from cats somewhere. They meowed and purred. How strange: I had always thought that cats purr like this usually to ask humans for food, but there were no humans, hence no reason for them to purr. Still their purring sounds approached gradually.

I got up in a panic.

Pang.

Pang.

The ball repeatedly hit the wall, making such sounds. I played tennis now and then. Certainly, there was no one who could play tennis with me, so I was just playing with the wall.

Pang.

Pang.

The ball kept flying to and fro the wall and me.

Soon I got tired and lay on the ground.

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"What should I do with these cats?"

She said, puzzled.

"I gave them a bit of food, and now all of them are following me."



I was shocked.

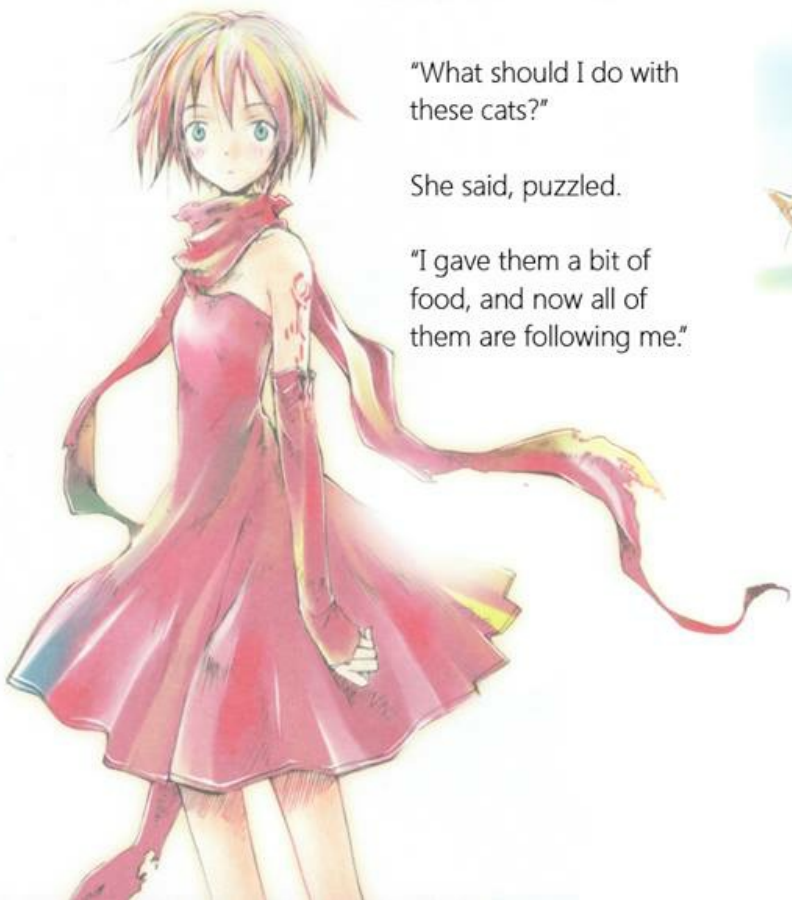
A girl was strolling on the path in the park. Behind her were countless cats—black cats, white cats, dark brown cats, multicoloured cats, kittens...

The number was way over a hundred.

"Um..."

I made a voice in reflex. It had been five months since I last saw a human. This was why I thought I was the only human and didn't believe anyone else existed. Maybe the person in front of me was only a hallucination, a hallucination made because I couldn't stand being alone.

She noticed me.



I was shocked.

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“What should I do with these cats?”

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“I gave them a bit of food, and now all of them are following me.”

There were people of all sorts in this world.

They really existed.

Humans in their last moments would expose their ugliest facades.

Therefore, it was difficult to retain sanity. Even for me, I might go berserk if I continue living alone. Perhaps I had already gone berserk.

This is what she said on that night.

"I'm an investigation body."

"An investigation body?"

"This planet's intellectual beings are being exterminated. Before its complete extermination, I have to make records."

"So you're a cosmic being?"

"A bit different. I'm an investigation body, not a cosmic being. Living machines do exist."

I nodded carefully.

"Are you appearing as a human so as not to scare me away?"

"Yeah. You understand quite quickly."

Insisting with the reason to investigate me, she started living with me.



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When asked about her name, she said, "What is a name?"

"It's a way to refer to individuals."

"Okay, I understand. I don't have one, that is. You can decide for me."

"So let's name you *Snow*."

I named her *Snow* because it was winter.

Was it too simple?

I didn't believe in everything she said, but I could tell Snow was a strange person from head to toe.

She didn't know anything.

She destroyed the vacuum-packed rice by overheating it.

She kept on biting the can with her teeth.

She obstinately believed that there was a living being in the electric generator.

When she was once asleep, I stole a peek at her face.

She slept soundly, her breathing patterns extremely stable. She looked just like another other girl. But if you have to insist that she was a living machine, I wouldn't deny the possibility.

On her arm, however, there was a strange mark.

It looked like a symbol.

A cosmic being?

An investigation body?

Who knows?

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I taught her how to play tennis.

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Pang.

The ball kept flying to and fro her and me.

Pang.

Pang.

Gradually, she became adept at it.

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When we were done playing tennis, we came to a corner in the park.

The large, symbolic oak was standing there.

Kana was sleeping endlessly at its roots.

"What is this?"

Snow asked me, pointing at the wooden plank stuck there.

"She's a person I'm a bit familiar with. People are buried here after they die."

"So you humans bury dead people underground?"

"You're right."

"So you come here for a look now and then?"

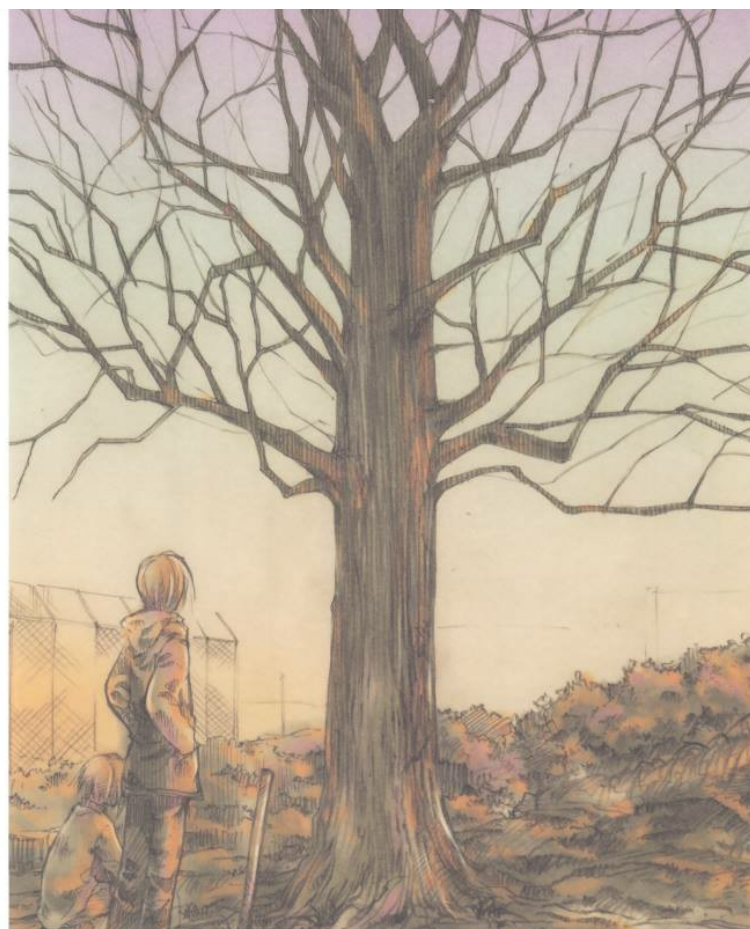
"Yeah."

I inverted the bottle of water, its contents splattering on the roots of the oak, soaked up by the soil.

"It would be great if I could have a can of peach."

"A can of peach?"

"I could get my spirits up if I had one."



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Kana wasn't willing to believe me no matter how.

She threw deeply suspicious glances at me and would even tremble incessantly when near me. While she slept at night, she would lock herself in the small restroom, holding its key tightly.

It was on the seventh day that I could, having gone through much effort, see her smile.

When asked what she wanted to eat, she said, "A can of peach."

So I went to the supermarket in the adjacent street to find her one, as there were none in the supermarket in this street.

After two hours of hard work, I found it and gave her.

"Thank you."

It was a sobbing yet smiling face.

And this was the last smile I saw.

The next morning, she stopped breathing.

I met Kana in this park.

She was lying on the road.

Dirt was all over her body, her clothes ragged, no shoes on her. When I held her, her body was as hot as a pocket warmer: she was already sick.

Even so, I took her to my room and took care of her.

After three days of high fever and nightmares, she woke up.

"N-No..."

Looking at me, she made sounds of hysterical fear.

Humans in their last moments would expose their ugliest facades.

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The world was shrouded by the radiance of the moon.

The moonlight was like the sea.

I had lost everything I could have.

The world was sinking to the bottom of the sea.

Wavering and fluttering.

I had stopped thinking about what I want to have.

Nothing would be lost if nothing was attained.

In the night, *Snow* brought me back from my reminiscing of Kana.

"Kazufumi, you look strange."

"What do you mean?"

"You've been murmuring for a while."

"I thought about something."

"Do humans murmur when they think about things?"

"It depends on what they're thinking."

Something wavered lightly in my heart.



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Even when humans didn't exist any longer, the sun would still rise and set; the wind would still get colder. Something was also changing in my heart, certainly, but I would never know what or why.

"Kazufumi, what's wrong?"

Snow asked.

"I don't feel like murmuring lately. I want to go somewhere right now," I said, putting on my coat, "I have something to do. I'm going out."

"Okay, I'm going as well."

"You don't have to go. I'm in a rush."

I dashed out in a flurry, dispelling Snow's face and her worried eyes away from my head forcibly. Nothing would be lost if nothing was attained...

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On the platform stood a middle-aged man who wore a gray suit, a white shirt, and a blue tie.

So there were still survivors...

While I was still surprised, the middle-aged man said, "The train is late."

"What?"

"This is going to be a problem. I have an appointment, you see."

The middle-aged man burst into laughter.

A closer look revealed his jacket wrinkled.

The chest part of his shirt was also tainted by oil.

Radiance of madness filled his eyes.

I walked pointlessly.

My ears were being slapped by the chilly wind, my toes numb. Even so, I kept walking, for there was no destination.

It might be great if I happen to end up walking to the South Pole.

Simply leaving this town might be great.

I would live in solitude again: to wake up alone; to eat alone; to sleep alone. No one could perturb me; no one could destroy me. Isn't it great to abandon it before it gets lost? Nothing is simpler than this. *Snow* might become lonely for a while, but she would soon accommodate.

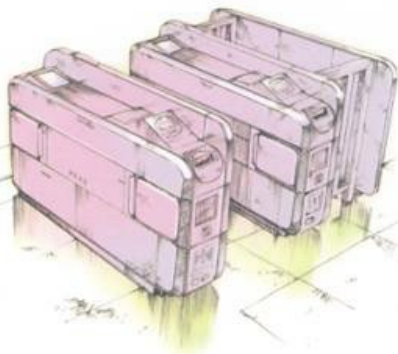
I thought about this quite seriously.

After a while, I saw the Shinjuku station.

Without further consideration, I passed through the ticket entrance and went inside.

"Hey, Good morning!"

Following the bright voice, I found my way to the platform for the twelfth track.



Why didn't the train come?

"How great would it be if the train came earlier!"

I exclaimed and dashed away from the platform, fleeing down the stairs, skipping a tread in every step.

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The setting sun dyed the world crimson.

I looked for *Snow* under such light rays. The supermarket we frequented—she wasn't there; the library on the slope—she wasn't there; the tennis court—she wasn't there.

Suddenly, I remembered something and headed to the place where Kana rested.

Cat grass was placed on the roots of the oak.

"She came here..."

I once told her an important offering had to be placed in front of a grave.

When I returned to my room, I couldn't find *Snow*.

"*Snow?*"

Only my sound reverberated in the small room.

I waited for one hour.

I waited for two hours.

I waited for three hours.

Snow didn't return.

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Snow! Where are you?!

Suddenly, something flew
from the byway.

A dark brown cat.



"You're wrong, *Snow!*"

When I came to, I was running and speaking to myself.

"Kana won't be happy if you offer her cat grass."

I looked everywhere: the dark park, alleys between the buildings, the two sides of the highway marked by graffiti—I kept running despite my breathing difficulties. I kept calling her name, my voice reverberating in the empty city.

Fear and anxiety drove me almost crazy. I started to question myself.

Why am I pushing myself so far? Isn't she just a girl with a weird personality? Who cares where she came from or where she will go? Look, am I not alone as I wished? But why am I calling for her? Why am I running? What am I seeking?

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A dark brown cat.

In succession, the cats appeared.

Black cats, white cats, dark brown
cats, multicoloured cats, kittens...

I stared into the end of the byway.



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Black cats, white cats, dark brown cats, multicoloured cats, kittens...

I stared into the end of the byway.



Snow was there.

She was walking here, leading several hundred cats.

When she saw me, she smiled.

"I gave them a bit of food, and now all of them are following me."

"Where...Where did you go?"

I was panting; I was seeking.

She gave me a cylindrical object.

"I guess, Kazufumi, you will get your spirits up if you have this."

A can of peach.

"I couldn't find it in the supermarket we frequent, so I had to look for it in a shop far away."

Snow was there.

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“I couldn’t find it in the supermarket we frequent, so I had to look for it in a shop far away.”

Several hundred cats were purring and meowing around us.

"The kittens sound like singing."

Hearing their purrs, *Snow* said. Her lips were frozen to purple by the cold; her cheeks were red. Just where did she go for that can of peach?

"Like a happy song..."

In the middle of her words, I embraced her without further consideration. I felt, unexpectedly, in this first embrace, her cold body.



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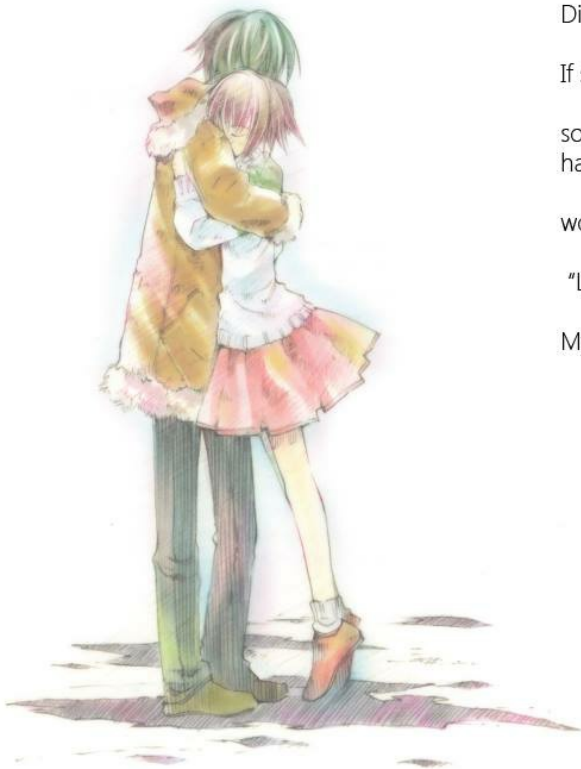


Yet her breaths were warm.

Warmer than anything.

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Warmer than anything.



Didn't Snow come here to make records of me?

If she really were an investigation body—

sorrow, happiness, despair, hope, even love and the feeling of
having something lost—

would be recorded indifferently.

"Let's head back, Snow."

My voice trembling, I said.

"To our home."

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